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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000437

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [DJ](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [SMIG](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: REFUGEE SURGE: DJIBOUTI FEELS THE WOES OF
INSTABILITY IN THE REGION

Classified By: RSO ELLEN TANNOR for reasons (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Djibouti, by most measures, is one of the more stable countries in the Horn of Africa. As a result it has become an attractive destination for refugees and immigrants from the entire region, but particularly Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Due to increased turmoil and instability in southern Somalia, the looming possibility of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and political violence in Kenya, record numbers of refugees and illegal immigrants are suddenly seeking relief in Djibouti.

¶2. (C) In the first quarter of 2008, the Government of Djibouti (GoDJ), particularly the National Police, the primary agency responsible for immigration, reported that at least 5,000 refugees were apprehended illegally crossing the border. According to the Director General of the National Police, Col. Abdillahi Abdi, this figure is estimated to reflect only 20 percent of the number of refugees that have actually crossed into Djibouti. It is believed that the other 80 percent, who are not accounted for, either disappears into the Djiboutian population or attempts to transit to countries in the Arabian Peninsula for economic gain. A great portion of refugees are from Somalia; previously, the majority of Somali refugees were from northern Somalia/Somaliland; but now the new influx is from the destabilized, war-torn areas of Southern Somalia, particularly Mogadishu.

¶3. (U) In contrast with the first quarter 2008 refugee numbers, the National Police report the total number of refugees arrested or detained in 2007 was 16,000. If current trends prevail, by the end of 2008 there could be upwards of 100,000 refugees that have crossed the border into Djibouti. Considering the entire population of Djibouti is estimated to be between 500,000 and 800,000 people, this flow could quickly overwhelm and/or destabilize the area.

¶4. (C) The dramatic and completely unexpected increase in the amount of refugees arriving in Djibouti raises greater concern for the overall security and stability in country. While the United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that most refugees have fled their homeland due to political persecution, war, and drought, there is a propensity for criminal elements, terrorists, and opportunists to disguise themselves in the mostly at-large refugee population in Djibouti. This is of particular concern as most of the newly arriving refugees reported by UNHCR and GoDJ are primarily from the Mogadishu area in southern Somalia, and north-eastern Kenya, where there are known and active terrorist cells, e.g. Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) al-Shabaab, and al-Qaida in East Africa (AQ).

¶5. (C) The collection and holding of the majority of the willing refugees are within two areas: the UNHCR camp at Ali

Adde (approximately 80 miles south of the capital), and the National Police Detention Center at Nagad (located in the capital, approximately 2 miles south from U.S. Naval Base Camp Lemonnier). Currently, the UNHCR camp houses 8,000 to 10,000 refugees, and the Nagad Detention Center can temporarily hold approximately 500 people. There is a basic registration procedure at the Ali Adde camp and Nagad detention center, but no real verification process to seek the identities of those claiming refugee status. The responsibility for refugee security is shared between the National Police and UNHCR. UNHCR has one representative in Djibouti who is responsible for ensuring the safety and control of the Ali Adde camp, while the Djiboutian National Police are responsible for security at Ali Adde and Nagad centers. When the detention camp is full and GoDJ is not able to deport immigrants in a timely manner or sustain them at the detention center, the GoDJ is forced to release the detainees back into the general population, voiding any gains made by their apprehension.

¶6. (C) Although the GoDJ and the National Police have exhibited earnest intentions and solid efforts to provide good border, immigration, and refugee control, they lack funding, resources, manpower, training and experience to adequately do so. To date, the GoDJ has not been able to deter, contain, track or effectively manage the flow of refugees into Djibouti. The GoDJ does not possess capable means of verifying the identities of existing, yet alone incoming refugees. The vast majority of Somali refugees do not possess birth certificates or any type of identification; furthermore, most Somali documents can not be authenticated because of rampant fraud and lack of a legitimate government.

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Loyada, the border point between Djibouti and Somaliland presents particular challenges, as it has no natural barriers (i.e. rivers, mountains, forests, etc.) and this is where the vast majority of refugees are crossing. There is no deterrent or impediment, natural or otherwise, from crossing the border into Djibouti as it stands.

¶7. (C) Local security concerns are growing amid a refugee population that has become increasingly more visible within the city limits. As the summer months approach, concerns rise even more as Djibouti represents one of the hottest and most extreme environments to operate in. The heat can be debilitating as it reaches upward of 130 degrees F and unforgiving to those unfamiliar with the terrain. Extreme climate, coupled with a surprisingly high cost of living, lack of jobs and social services, can easily force refugees into criminal elements and other desperate acts as an avenue for survival. Even before the refugee surge, Djiboutian authorities reported that approximately 80 percent of crimes in Djibouti City were committed by Somalis or Ethiopians. To aggravate matters, 2008 will be the first year since its existence in country that USAID has no food aid to donate to the GoDJ for refugees; the World Food Program has also not delivered on its promises for financial support. UNHCR and the few donor groups in country are understaffed and completely overwhelmed in their capabilities by this unexpected refugee surge.

¶8. (S) COMMENT: The Regional Security Office continues to meet with host country law enforcement authorities and other government officials to monitor the refugee situation and the security implications it may have in the city and on the Mission. Due to the Djiboutian government's inability to accurately identify and monitor refugee and migrant movements, there is real concern for terrorist/anti-U.S. and host government groups to hide and disappear with the growing number of uncountable refugees. GRPO continues to work closely with the National Security Service in efforts to detect unassuming refugees who may be potential terrorist cells that could infiltrate and set up operation in Djibouti. Post leadership is actively engaged with the host government at the highest levels and is seeking support from Washington

to mitigate the unintended consequences of the refugee influx. Despite efforts by the host government, UNHCR and donor groups, without additional support and resources from outside entities, the prognosis for this situation looks grim at best. END COMMENT.

19. (U) The point of contact for this report is Regional Security Officer, Ellen Tannor, (253) 353 995 ext. 2307.
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